



DERBY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dr. Matthew Conway, Jr.
Superintendent of Schools

Co-Chair Senator McCrory
Co-Chair Representative Currey
Ranking Member Senator Berthel
Ranking Member Representative McCarty

Dear Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and Honorable Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Aimee Misset and I write to you today as the Principal of Irving School in Derby and a former Literacy Coach.

My name is Stacy Mullenax and I write to you today as a Reading Specialist with the Derby Public School System. I am a 2014 Anne E. Fowler Fellowship Graduate of Fairfield University in which I earned an advanced degree in Teaching and Foundations with a concentration in literacy, language and culture.

We would like to share comments about Raised Bill No. 1094 **AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF READING MODELS OR PROGRAMS** from the perspective of experienced practitioners working through the Science of Reading journey on a daily basis.

When we joined the district, we had been teaching with a commercial ELA program for many years. Teachers were asked to use it as their curriculum and teach with it with fidelity. It was not giving our students what they needed to make any type of significant gains, despite being what was considered a great ELA program for the time. In many ways it even contradicted professional development from approved state vendors in which we had invested significant time and resources. So we began a journey of seeking out evidence-based programs that matched our Science of Reading best practices. This has taken time and careful planning, but we are seeing the results in our students and our teacher's confidence and efficacy. We have a vision of what the best possible ELA instruction should look like and need the time and professional flexibility to continue on this journey. While we understand that this is a great opportunity to strengthen our literacy instruction in certain areas, we want to do it with evidence and purpose.

Take a journey with us. We want you to visualize this road that Derby Public School System has built. As we are driving down this road, we are building our knowledge of the science of reading and best practices in literacy instruction. It was a long, complex journey, but it was also full of triumphs and celebrations because we can see our destination. Now we are at a fork in the road. We are mandated to make a choice by June of this year for the next school year. A choice that will have a significant impact on students and educators.

Visualize the path on the right. This path took a long time to build. This road was built on a solid foundation of research based practices supported by the Science of Reading. Explicit and systematic instruction using resources and supports like Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Program, Wilson Foundations, and structured literacy lessons. Through the use of these resources, we are seeing academic success at greater rates than ever before. But this path has a roadblock. These resources are not on the approved list.

So, we have to take the path on the left, a path that we have been down before and leaves us with many concerns and questions. As we have begun vetting the approved programs, we already recognize areas that don't align with our training and our vision. So similar to the past, this path has some holes that we will need to fill. There is simply insufficient time to review our roadmap and ensure these programs fit our district.. Like a road that often needs repairs, a program is only a tool. Teachers must know how to use the tools they are given correctly and confidently to ensure our students become skilled readers and critical thinkers. No one program will have every tool, or show teachers how to use those tools, in a way that meets the needs of every learner. This is why time and professional flexibility to make decisions about how we use these new resources is so important. If we rush, we risk moving backwards on the path and progress we have built.

Any program can be purchased and teachers would likely happily utilize what is given, but we need to stop and think about how they are using the tools we give them and are these tools the correct ones to keep us on the right path.

We recognize the need for vetted and approved resources, but we need the flexibility to supplement with other evidence based practices that are already showing positive impacts. In addition to allowing flexibility in choice, we urge you to vote in favor of providing an extension in time to allow districts across the state of Connecticut to make an informed decision, and we ask for continued support for ongoing professional development, because we believe the students deserve the absolute best.

Thank you for your time and consideration.